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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 001007

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: QATARI OFFER TO BREAK LEBANESE LOGJAM ROUNDLY
DISMISSED

REF: BEIRUT 1005

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Late September 10 after Saad Hariri's withdrawal as prime minister-designate (reftel), reports spread rapidly that Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jaber al Thani had offered to host the Lebanese for another Doha conference to resolve their issues. Some contacts, thinking back to the Doha conference of 2008 that yielded an interim unity government in Lebanon, immediately surmised to us that the Qatari offer was an attempt to upstage the Saudis and their ally Hariri in the wake of the failed negotiations. Others speculated that the announcement, which came on the heels of bin Jassem's meeting in Paris with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, was a French-Qatari plan to steal the limelight from the USG. "This is depressing. It is disgraceful if every time there is difficulty Lebanese have to go outside to find a solution," downcast caretaker Minister of State without portfolio Nassib Lahoud commented to the Ambassador upon learning the news.

"NICE TRY" BUT NO THANKS

12. (C) The next day, bin Jassem's offer was dismissed as either misreported or premature by a range of political actors. "Tell bin Jassem, 'Nice try,'" Hariri advisor Nader Hariri told polchief sarcastically on September 11. "It's not an option on the table, and we don't need it now." According to Hariri, the immediate next step is for each parliamentary bloc to meet and agree on a new PM-designate nomination in the next few days. Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir echoed Hariri to the Ambassador the same day, saying, "Going to Doha one time is acceptable, but returning many times is not."

13. (C) For his part, pro-majority Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar told Ambassador that the Qatari proposal had received a "very negative reaction," as "Doha II" would almost certainly mean additional "binding conditions, even worse than the blocking third." On-again, off-again Hariri advisor Ghattas Khoury told us that the Qatari emir's aide Yousef bin Jaber had telephoned him after midnight to seek his reaction to the announcement. "I said that we will think about it," said Khoury, "but what I didn't say is that we should be able to solve this ourselves and that we would be concerned that

Syria would show up." Nevertheless, it is not improbable that the Lebanese eventually will have to resort to outside mediation as they have in the past, assessed Jean-Pierre Katrib, advisor to majority Kataeb MP Sami Gemayel. Katrib, who believes that Hariri stepped down in an attempt to save face, said that his Future Movement allies have underscored the lack of appetite for violence even if Hariri's task might be more difficult in a second round as PM-designate.

A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT?

¶4. (C) Ali Hamdan, an advisor to opposition Amal head Nabih Berri, told us he had called two reporters present at the press conference in Paris to confirm the comments. They had clarified that when asked, "Is Qatar preparing another Doha?" bin Jassem had merely replied, "We are ready to help the Lebanese...if necessary." Hamdan pointed out that bin Jassem has consistently made such supportive statements throughout the cabinet formation process and asserted that there is currently no proposal to continue cabinet negotiations outside the country. If the blockage is the result of regional tensions, he suggested, then let the regional forces settle it directly among themselves.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) As both sides reassess the way forward after the collapse of negotiations, we expect many parties to float proposals and stake out their positions. Thus far, the dialog has been reasonably civil with both Hariri-aligned

Progressive Socialist Party head Walid Jumblatt and Hizballah MP Mohammad Fneish calling for continued negotiations in pursuit of a national unity government. Hariri's camp has been clear that they will develop a unified majority position to nominate him again as PM-designate and then address the issue of a return to the negotiating table.

SISON